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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000872

SIPDIS

NSC FOR J. FRASER
CAIRO FOR MAXSTADT
LONDON FOR GURNEY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BUHARI'S MOVEMENTS NOT RESTRICTED;
BUT CAMPAIGN RALLIES WERE CANCELLED

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons:
1.5 (B & D).

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: On April 30, there was confusion whether ANPP Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari had been restricted to his house in Daura, Katsina State. Buhari's supporters asserted that he had been placed under de facto house arrest. GON officials disavowed the claim, stating that Buhari had only been stopped from holding political rallies because his party had refused to get the required permits. ANPP members claim they had the necessary permits. Definitely, Buhari was not placed under arrest. However, the rumors of his arrest and the cancellation of the political rallies only add to the political tension, particularly in northern Nigeria. END SUMMARY.

[12.](#) (SBU) The BBC Hausa radio service reported early on April 29 that ANPP Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari had been restricted to his residence. The Katsina State Police Commissioner reportedly told the Katsina ANPP Chairman that Buhari was restricted to his house "on orders." In an afternoon broadcast, the Press Officer for the Katsina State Police Command told the BBC that the restriction was not on Buhari but on political activity. "All political rallies in Katsina State have been cancelled due to security reasons," he said on the air.

[13.](#) (C) According to a contact in the Buhari campaign press office, Buhari was told "not to leave his house on orders from the Presidency." This contact said that Buhari had scheduled a full slate of rallies for that week to encourage ANPP supporters not to boycott the May 3 State Assembly elections. "If we prevail at the tribunals, we want State Assemblies supportive of our winning candidates," he said. (COMMENT: This comment cannot be taken at face value. A Buhari campaign official would want to make Obasanjo look the part of the undemocratic heavy. Making people believe that Obasanjo ordered Buhari's house arrest would be a fine way of accomplishing this feat. END COMMENT.)

[14.](#) (C) A flag officer at the Ministry of Defense told Poloff that President Obasanjo had ordered the military to arrest Buhari. According to the source, Obasanjo had been encouraged by "hawks" within the Presidency, who told him, "no one reacted when Abacha had you arrested." The source said that Director of Military Intelligence Maj. Gen. Williams Ajibade sent a memo to the Chief of Army Staff advising him that the military should remain neutral, describing the dispute as "political" and an "issue for the police." After the COAS showed the memo to Obasanjo, Ajibade was immediately reassigned to the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies. Source claimed that Obasanjo had "rethought" Buhari's arrest and now realized that the move would have been counter-productive. This same account was repeated to Poloff by a mid-level member of the President's staff and, subsequently, by a retired military officer.

[15.](#) (U) Buhari had been scheduled to hold rallies in Funtua (Katsina State) on April 28 and Zaria (Kaduna State) and Katsina Ala (Benue State) on April 29. He had reportedly scheduled other rallies on April 30. The ANPP claims that all rallies were scheduled in advance and that the police had issued appropriate permits.

16. (C) Contacts in the Funtua LGA told Emboffs that ANPP party leaders in Funtua had been arrested on April 28 and Buhari was advised not to travel as "there would be no rally." According to an Emirate source, ANPP leaders in Zaria were informed by security services that the scheduled April 29 rally would not be allowed to take place and Buhari would not be able to visit Zaria.

17. (C) The rendition of events given by the GON was starkly different from what ANPP members told us. Director General of State Security Service Kayode Are told the Ambassador that Buhari was never restricted to his house and that his freedom of movement had not been abridged. However, the police stopped the ANPP from conducting a political rally because the party had not applied for the required permit. Are said that the permit would be granted if the party applied. He added further that ANPP supporters were being purposefully confrontational by attempting to stage the rally without a permit. ANPP stalwarts were hoping to provoke a response from the police that would escalate political tension, Are asserted. However, the police had been cautioned to exercise restraint.

18. (C) In a meeting with DCM, ANPP National Chairman Don Etiebet also contradicted earlier statements made by his party members. Confirming Are's statement, Etiebet summarily dismissed the claim that Buhari had been restricted to his house.

19. (C) While observing the May 3 elections in Katsina State May 3, Poloff drove past Buhari's Daura residence. About 20 policemen and 10-15 military personnel were in front of the residence, but the gates were open and people appeared to be coming and going freely. According to the ANPP chairman in Katsina, Buhari had visited Funtua and Katsina just prior to elections, but no rallies were held. (Comment: As an ex-Head of State, Buhari has a security detail, which was probably beefed up when he entered the race for the Presidency. Moreover, Katsina was one of the Northern States where the GON expected trouble. End Comment).

110. (C) COMMENT: One event, two vastly different versions of what happened. In a nutshell, Buhari was not restricted to his residence but political rallies were cancelled. We seriously doubt that the government would be foolish enough to arrest Buhari. In the end, this episode was a tempest in a teapot; however, some ANPP members sought to make it a storm. Nevertheless, the police were being formalistic and probably did not act with much aplomb when canceling the campaign rallies. While this incident eventually fizzled out, anxiety remains high and we expect more such rumors and intense moments, before the May 29 Presidential inauguration.

JETER